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Brikena Xhaferi**Gëzim Xhaferi**

South East European University

Tetovo

Teachers' perceptions of multilingual education and teaching in a multilingual classroom - the case of the Republic of Macedonia

Macedonia is a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural country where the language teachers face challenges in their classrooms. South East European University (SEEU) is located in Tetovo, Macedonia and it was established in 2001. It has a branch campus in Skopje. SEEU has five faculties: Contemporary Sciences and Technologies, Law, Public Administration, Business Economics and faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications. The students enrolled at the SEEU have different ethnicities Albanians, Macedonians, Turkish, Roma, etc. The study programs are offered in three languages: Albanian, Macedonian and English and all students enrolled at SEEU can choose their language of study.

The aim of the paper is to find out teachers' perceptions about multicultural education and what teaching techniques they employ in their instruction. Current literature deals with second language teaching and focuses on either the recommendation of different methods of teaching a second language or describing the experiences of second language learners. Nevertheless, few studies in Macedonia try to investigate the phenomenon of teaching students in a multilingual environment and investigate teachers' perceptions of teaching in a multilingual classroom.

The research context is the SEEU and the study uses two methods: Teacher Questionnaire and Classroom Observations. The findings from the data suggest that teachers find teaching in a multicultural classroom challenging and enjoyable.

Key words: South East European University; multicultural education; teaching techniques; teachers' perceptions.



1. Introduction

Curriculum and teaching strategies should be designed to help to eliminate prejudices and to promote multicultural understanding (Sparks and Verner 1995).

The Republic of Macedonia is a country located in the Central Balkan Peninsula. It is one of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, from which it declared independence in 1991. According to the census done in 2002, ethnic groups who live in this country are: Macedonians (65.2%), Albanians (24.2%), Turks (3.9%), Roma (2.7%), and 4.0% others. The official languages in the Republic of Macedonia are the Macedonian language and the Albanian Language. The Macedonian language belongs to South Slavic languages and it is spoken by 2-3 million people who live in the country and in the diaspora. On the other hand, the Albanian language belongs to the Indo-European languages and does not belong to any other existing branch. In Macedonia people generally speak more than two (Macedonian/Albanian or Turkish) or even three languages.

The Macedonian education system consists of pre-school education, primary, secondary and higher education. There are many state and private universities located in different cities in Macedonia but the South East European University, where the present study is done, has the most-modern facilities. It is located in Tetova, and it has five faculties. All study programs follow the pattern of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), conform to the Bologna Agreement. The diplomas obtained at SEEU are recognized in a wide international/European perspective. There are around 175 professors and young assistants employed at the University. Many distinguished professors from different European and American universities give lectures on different topics. There are around 7000 students enrolled and they have an opportunity to get a scholarship from the university. Since its establishment, in 2001, SEEU offers study programs in three languages: Albanian, Macedonian and English. This makes the SEEU unique in the region and it aims to prepare the students to function in today's diverse society.

Many studies have shown that multicultural education has a great impact on the student achievement and teaching techniques that teachers employ. The present study will try to investigate teachers' perceptions of teaching in multilingual classes at the university level because it is our belief that perception is very important in teaching.



2. Multilingualism and teaching

The term multilingualism is a broad concept which covers a wide range of linguistic habits, talents, and measures, from individual bilingualism to diglossia and official language policies. The most general definition is that a multilingual person is a person who can speak and use several languages. Teaching in a multicultural environment is becoming very important in the 21st century due to a large numbers of emigrants in different countries of the world. These unfamiliar groups, cultures, and traditions can produce anxieties, hostilities, prejudices, and racist behaviours among those who do not understand newcomers. These issues have profound implications for developing instructional programs and practices at all levels of education that respond positively and constructively to diversity (Gay, 2004 cited in Flinders and Thornton 2004: 314).

As professors of English and German languages at SEEU, we find teaching in a multicultural environment challenging due to diversity in our classes. It is dynamic, and therefore teachers should give efforts to respond to this diversity. Dunphy (1998, para. 1) believes that

[t]his multiplicity can enrich the students' experience, but it can also present an obstacle to the full and productive participation of some class members. It is incumbent on us, as teachers in this environment, to understand these difficulties and help all our students to engage fully in their education.

Similarly, Jones (2003 cited in Begum and Khondaker 2008: 21) believes that multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning and democratic values and beliefs are its foundation. He further states that every student in the United States comes to school with their own level of cultural awareness and with their own cultural background. School is the place where students can share their stories and hear the stories of others.

However, there are some opposing views of their theory because in many institutions, education has not become yet a central part of the curriculum regularly offered to the students. Even though many educators (Grant and Gomez 2000; Bank and Bank 2002; Bennet 2003, as cited in Gay 2004: 316) believe that multicultural education is very important to promote qualitative education in practice teachers know that it can produce some crisis. They further state that "multicultural education is more than content, it includes policy, learning climate, leadership and evaluation... It must be an integral part of everything that happens in the education enterprise."



Another difficulty seen by the teachers is that some teachers are doubtful about the feasibility of its implementation and they lack confidence in making some changes in their teaching philosophies. Therefore, teachers' attitudes toward teaching in a multicultural environment are crucial especially in the Macedonian context. We strongly believe that this issue is very important because teachers should give their students a voice in the learning process, value their experiences, give them opportunities to work together, respect each other and live well with each other. Therefore, the findings of this study are of great importance in providing a deeper insight into the teachers' attitudes towards teaching at this institution.

3. Recent studies

Many studies dealt with the issue of multilingualism in Europe and around the world. A case study conducted in Europe in 2003 involved 6000 participants of different nationalities. The purpose was to assess current practices of multilingualism in a workplace and other segments of life of people who can speak many European languages. The main variable investigated was language use and attitude towards languages and language learning in different domains and scenarios. A questionnaire used was divided into five rubrics - background information, language background, languages at home, languages at work and language attitudes. Based on the results of this study, multilingualism is a regular feature of the European workplace.

There are two types of motivation identified among the participants, instrumental motivation, where there is a specific purpose to learning a particular language and integrative motivation, where language learning is a part of a desire to fit into a culture or identity with a different group or speaker. This case study reflected clearly the importance of multilingualism in a European context and it suggests that being able to communicate in a number of different languages is vital for democratic citizenship, the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance, as well as increased personal, social and personal mobility in a single marketplace.

Another study was conducted by O'Driscoll in 1999. He investigated language choice and attitudes at a personal level in a pan European community. The study was conducted in the College of Europe, Bruges and there were 266 participants involved in this study. The questionnaire items were related to inter-



action, general language use and attitudes, and also day-to-day communication based on specific student-student and student-staff encounters. The study results were that English language is dominant with French in second place. Then, English was seen as useful but French was a prestige language which students respect and they valued it more than English. Students do not tend to use their L1 with other students but they used their L2.

4. Research methodology

4.1 Research questions

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the teachers' perceptions of multilingual education and teaching in a multicultural classroom and their experiences?
- 2) Which are the most commonly-used techniques of teaching in a multilingual setting?

The study addresses the issues connected to teaching in a multicultural environment, SEEU, and they determine the teachers' perceptions of this issue and their roles in the language classroom. The study was carried out at the South East European University during the Fall semester 2010/11. The instruments used are the teacher questionnaire and classroom observations.

4.2. Participants

The participants of this study were the language professors and young assistants who teach at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications, South East European University. The sample consists of fifty professors and young assistants all of them teaching at this Faculty, in the Department of English Language and Literature, in the Department of Albanian language and Literature, in the Department of German Language and Literature and also those who teach Macedonian language to all students enrolled at SEEU. They were both males (21) and females (29) and their age ranged from 28-63. They all come from Macedonia and were educated in Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania.

In the second phase of the study, five professors and assistants were observed in order to find out teaching techniques they use in their everyday instruction.



All observed professors and young assistants hold either PhD or MA degree and their teaching experience ranges from 3-15 years teaching at university.

4.3. Instruments

The study uses two research instruments: a teacher questionnaire and a classroom observation protocol. The instruments were combined from different sources from the web.

The first instrument is a teacher questionnaire (See Appendix 1) and it includes thirty questions. It aims to find out teachers' perceptions' of education and teaching in a multilingual classroom. The participants had to circle the answers from 1 to 5, with number 1 being the least important and number 5 being the most important. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants individually and the answers were kept anonymous.

The second instrument was a class observation and it aimed to find out which are the most-commonly used teaching techniques in the language classes at SEEU. There were five professors and young assistants included in this phase. An observation protocol was used for this activity (See Appendix 2).

4.4. Study Results

4.4.1. Questionnaire results

The results are drawn from a sample consisting of fifty professors and young assistants who teach different languages, namely Albanian, Macedonian, English and German at South East European University, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications. It should be emphasized that they were all interested to participate in this project. The following are the results obtained from the questionnaire.

SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

U=Undecided

D=Disagree



SD=Strongly disagree

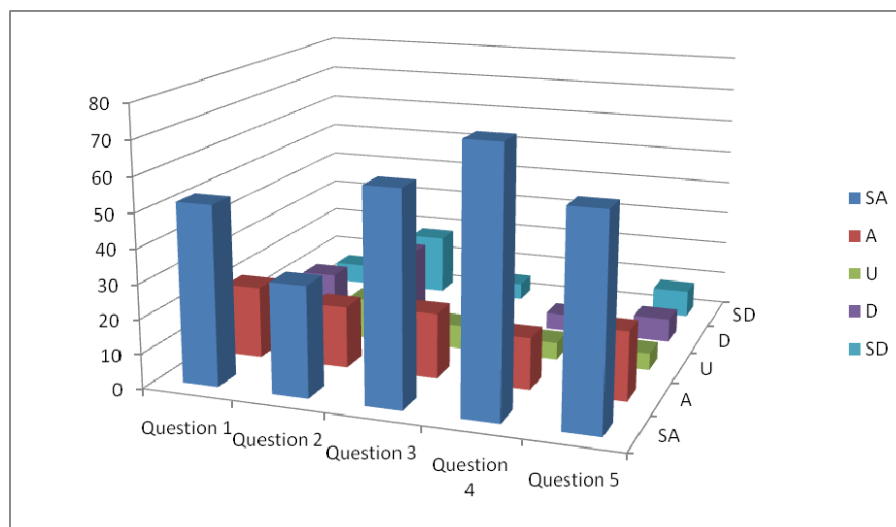


Figure 1. Results for Questions 1-5.

From Figure 1 it can be seen that item 4 “I think that younger generation should learn more than 2 languages” got the highest score and 78 percent of the participants strongly agreed that young generation should learn more than two languages. In fact, in the Macedonian context it is necessary in order to function normally in this environment. Also, item 5 “I think that multilingualism will help my students for their future carrier” got a high score where 60 percent of the participants strongly agreed with this statement.

From the results presented in Figure 2 we can see that item 6 “I enjoy teaching in a multicultural classroom” got the highest score, 55 percent. Also, item 10 “I think that multilingualism promote tolerance among people in my country” got a high score were 44 percent of the participants strongly agreed with it.

Figure 3 shows that 53 percent of the participants strongly agreed with the statement “I get enough support from my employer in working with pupils from another culture. The SEEU provide all the necessary support for teachers teaching at this Institution in terms of multilingual conferences, different textbooks without bias, and different teaching materials which can address variety in the classes.

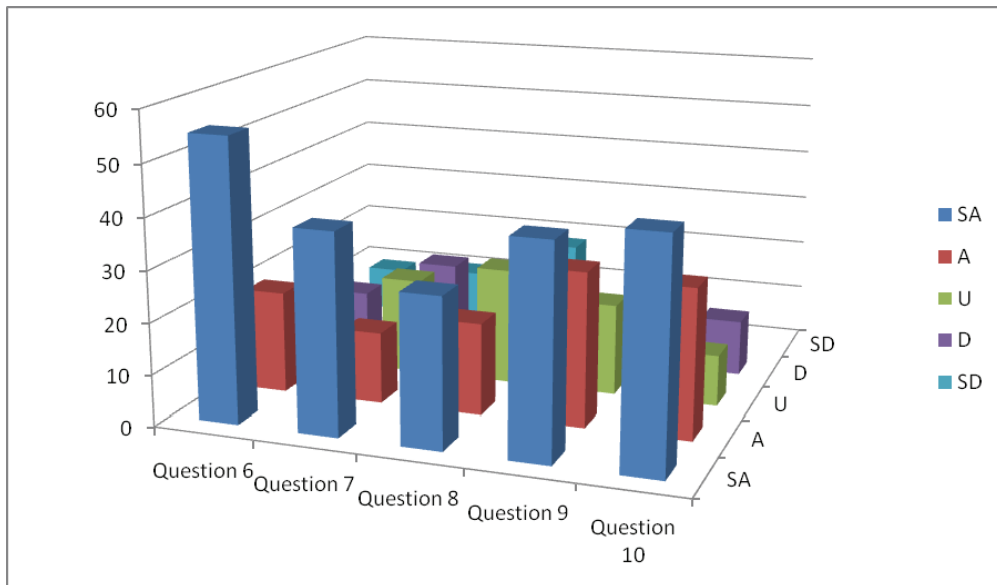


Figure 2. Results for questions 6-10.

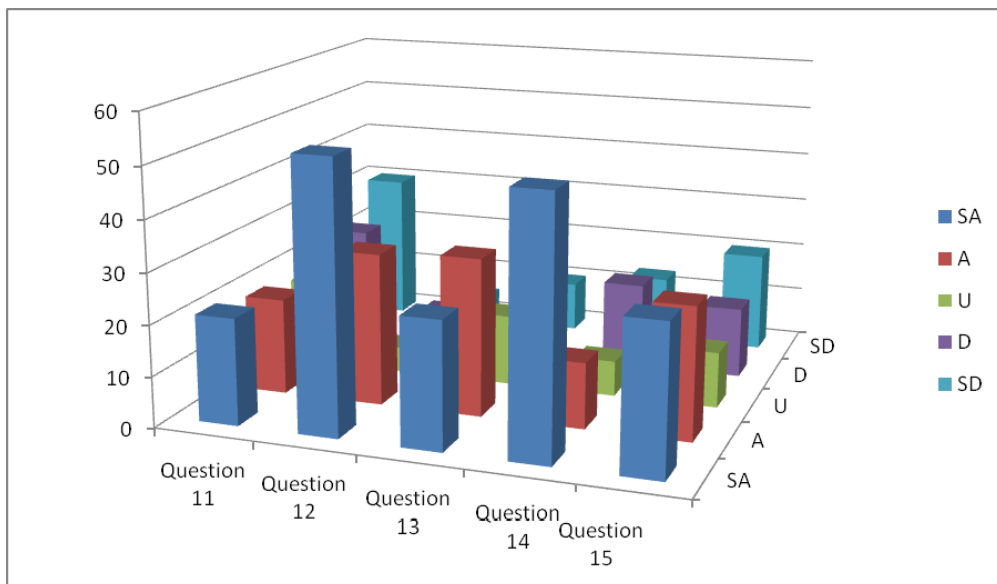


Figure 3. Results for questions 10-15.

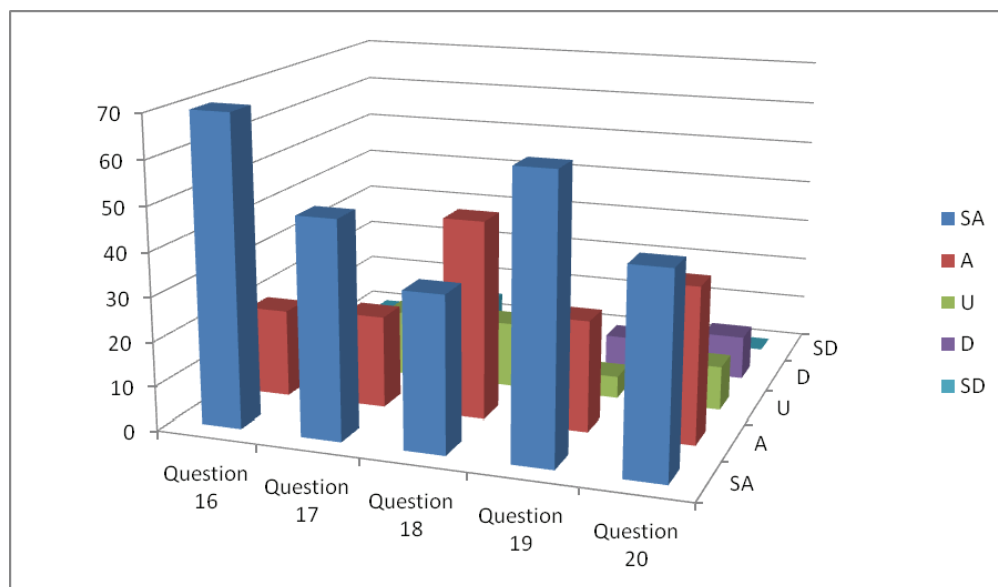


Figure 4. Results for questions 16-20.

The results presented in Figure 4, show that 70 percent of the participants strongly agreed with item 16, “I believe that different cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration when teaching.”

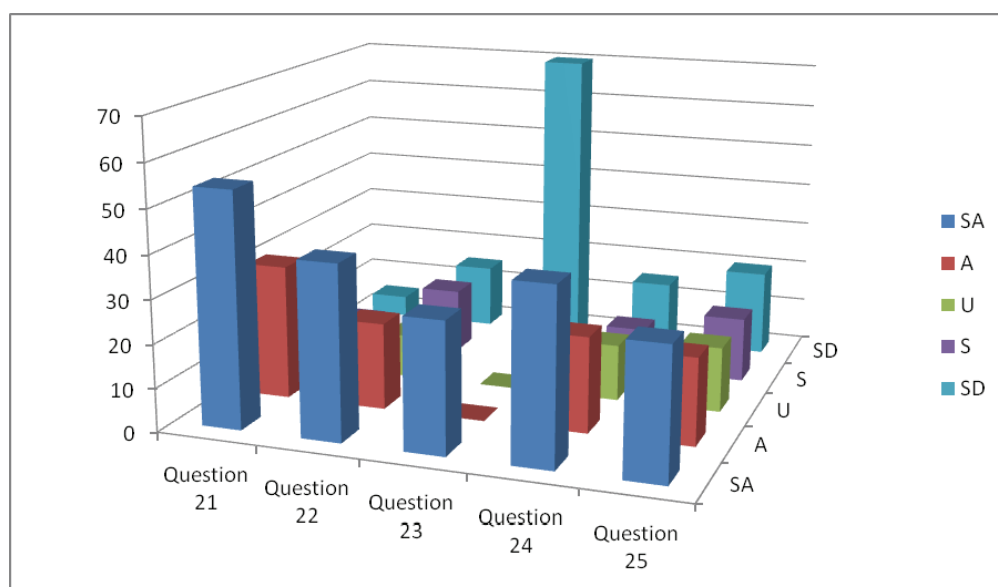




Figure 5. Results for questions 20-25.

Item 21 “I am able to develop strategies for student confidence” got the highest because 54 percent of the participants strongly agreed with it. On the other hand, 40 percent of the participants strongly agreed with two items, item 22 “I have received training on teaching methodologies in a multicultural environment” and item 24 “I have examined school curriculum and books for bias.”

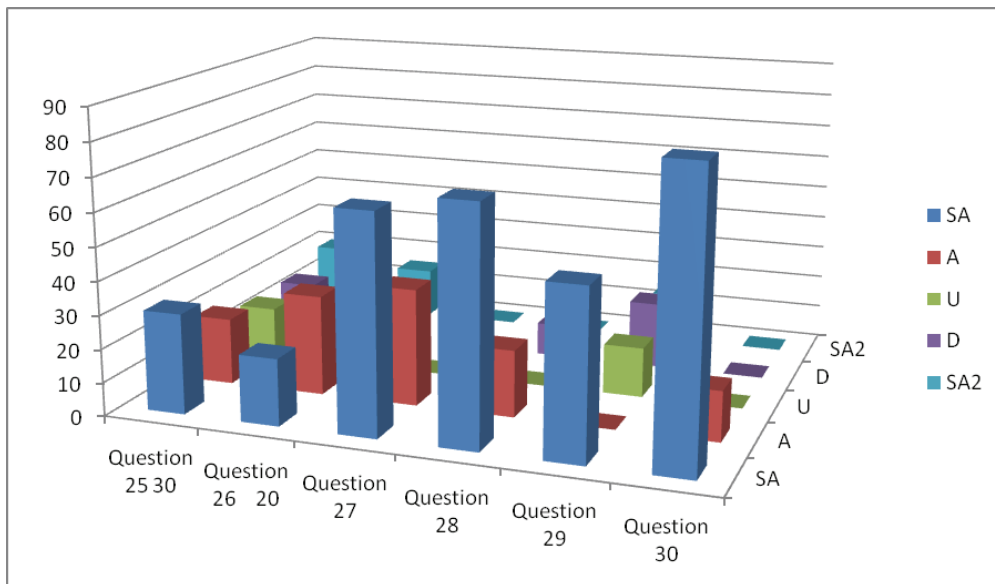


Figure 6. Results for questions 26-30.

In the end, it can be seen that 85 percent of the participants strongly agreed with item 30, “I promote classroom communication,” while 70 percent of the participants strongly agreed with item 28 “I teach all language skills equally.”

Overall, the results of the questionnaire show that SEEU professors and young assistants try very hard to promote classroom communication. Communicative activities include any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners, as well as with people in the program and community (Bilash 2009). There is a strong belief among participants of the study that younger generation should learn more than two languages due to the fact that they will have better employment chances. Another important issue is that majority of the participants teach language skills equally. Brown (2000: 218) believes that “the richness of integrated-skill courses give EFL students



greater motivation that converts to better retention of principles of effective speaking, listening, reading and writing.”

4.4.2. *Analysis of classroom observations*

In order to find out the most-used teaching techniques, five classroom observations were conducted; one English class, one German class, two Albanian classes and one Macedonian class. An observation protocol which was used for the study focused on the following components:

- (1) Description of the classroom
- (2) Characteristics of the students' attitudes toward the subject matter
- (3) Characteristics of the students' attitudes toward teacher
- (4) Materials used
- (5) Classroom activities
- (6) Teaching techniques used

	Description of the classroom	Characterize students attitudes toward the subject matter	Characterize students attitudes toward teacher	Materials Used	Classroom activities (Introduction to Lesson, Activity, Tasks and Conclusion)	Teaching Techniques used
T1	Large with posters on the wall	Students were enthusiastic to learn more	Very positive interesting questions in the end	Power point slides, handouts	Brainstorming pair work <u>Q& A</u>	Portfolio note-taking
T2	Sufficient with TV in the class	Paid attention to words and their pronunciation	Positive and note-taking strategy observed	TV and a handout	<u>Q& A</u> Reading summary	Dialogue project
T3	Sufficient with a bookshelf and books in it	Interested in the topic of the lesson	Impressed by the teacher explanation	A text-book, whiteboard and a newspaper	Presentation <u>Q& A</u> Report	Discussion writing a report
T4	Large with posters and	Motivated and paid attention	Interested in teacher's	A magazine, and a	Picture reading	Discussion diary writ-



	OHP	a lot	knowledge	textbook	exercises	ing
T5	Sufficient with TV	Listened and responded all the time	Positive about the choice of the teachers' activities	Power point slides	Brainstorming group work <u>Q&A</u>	Class debate discussion

Table 3. Classroom observations. T1=English teacher, T2= German teacher, T3= Albanian, T4=Macedonian, T5 = Albanian 2.

Based on the classroom observation results, it can be seen that SEEU language teachers use some very good techniques that promote all language skills. The most-used technique seems to be Questions and Answers (Q&A) and four teachers use it. This technique is useful because all students can be involved in the class. Then, another popular technique used among teachers is class discussion. It gives students a chance to express their ideas about different topics posed by the language teachers. Also, authentic materials are used in the classes. Authentic material is significant since it increases students' motivation for learning, makes the learner be exposed to the 'real' language (Guariento and Morley 2001, cited in Kilickaya 2004: para.1).

5.Conclusion

This paper offers some innovative results, since it investigated teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and their teaching experiences. It reveals very useful information in terms of the use of different teaching techniques at SEEU. As a consequence, the capacity to know what teachers think about multilingual education and the teaching techniques they use, can help us to improve the quality of the language teaching/learning process.

After the analysis of the data, this paper provides some conclusions: First, according to the participants, most of them believe that that younger generation should learn more than two languages since this is very important for their future carrier. In fact, in Macedonia almost all people who are involved in education speak more than two languages, Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish and English. This shows that people who live in multilingual environments have the ability to speak many languages. Another issue, which teachers find useful is that multilingualism help the students for their future carrier.



Additionally, it seems that the teaching goal is classroom communication. Effective classroom communication should involve all students and respond to the classroom diversity. Communication has the potential to build effective working relationships with students when there are positive interactions (Johnson 2010, para.1).

Finally, another issue identified by the study is that the use of authentic materials in the classes. Magazines, TV, Newspaper, posters are used by the teachers. This is very useful because discussing different topics in the class can help break different stereotypes that people might have for each other and it decreases prejudices. Also, examining textbooks and tests for bias should be a regular practice of all teachers because the students should be taught in a non-threatening environment.

In response to the second research question, the most-used classroom techniques are questions and answers (Q&A) and class discussion. Instead of testing comprehension, the Q&A technique increases student involvement and comprehension. Instruction over the last fifteen years has fostered effective classroom discussions as a crucial teaching skill. Also, teachers often do classroom debates. Debates provide an effective class structure where the students can express their view on different issues. This approach is useful for multicultural teaching.

All in all, it can be concluded that teachers' perceptions are very important because this increases both teacher and student motivation. There seems to be a great interest in promoting classroom discussion as a very useful technique in teaching. This makes language teaching and learning process more pleasant and enjoyable.

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Authors' address:

Brikena Xhaferi
South East European University
Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication
Ilindenska bb - Campus Bldg. 1003.01
1200 Tetovo
Republic of Macedonia
b.xhaferi@seeu.edu.mk

Gëzim Xhaferi
South East European University
Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication
Ilindenska bb - Campus Bldg. 1003.01
1200 Tetovo
Republic of Macedonia
g.xhaferi@seeu.edu.mk



**PERCEPCIJE NASTAVNIKA O VIŠEJEZIČNOM OBRAZOVANJU I NASTAVI –
PRIMJER REPUBLIKE MAKEDONIJE**

Makedonija je višejezična, multietnička i multikulturalna država u kojoj se nastavnici jezika suočavaju s brojnim izazovima u nastavi. Sveučilište jugoistočne Europe (SEEU) u Tetovu osnovano je 2001. a ima i svoj kampus u Skopju. SEEU ima pet fakulteta: Fakultet suvremenih znanosti i tehnologije, Pravni fakultet, Fakultet javne uprave, Ekonomski fakultet i Fakultet jezika, kulture i komunikacija. Studenti koji pohađaju ovo sveučilište različitih su nacionalnosti: Albanci, Makedonci, Turci, Romi, itd. Programi se izvode na tri jezika: albanskom, makedonskom i engleskom, a svi studenti upisani na SEEU mogu odabrati jezik na kojem žele studirati.

Cilj ovog rada je istražiti percepcije nastavnika o višejezičnom obrazovanju i tehnikama koje primjenjuju u nastavi. U literaturi se mogu pronaći preporuke za različite metode poučavanja stranih jezika ili opisi iskustava nastavnika stranih jezika. Međutim, malo je istraživanja u Makedoniji koja se bave fenomenom poučavanja u višejezičnom kontekstu usmjerenih na nastavnikove percepcije poučavanja u višejezičnim skupinama.

Istraživanje je provedeno na SEEU i korištene su dvije metode: upitnik za nastavnike i promatranje razredne situacije. Rezultati pokazuju da je nastavnicima poučavanje u višejezičnim skupinama izazov i zadovoljstvo.

Ključne riječi: Sveučilište jugoistočne Europe; multikulturalno obrazovanje; metode poučavanja; percepcije nastavnika.



Appendix 1

Teacher Questionnaire

Please, take few minutes and answer the following questions. The aim of this questionnaire is to find out your attitude towards teaching in a multicultural environment. Your answers will support my study a lot. Thank you for your time and effort.

Ran- king	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Un- certain	Dis- agree	Strongly disagree
1	I feel comfortable with teaching in mul- ticultural classroom.	52	21	11	10	6
2	I feel comfortable with parent interac- tion.	32	18	12	20	18
3	I think I am able to implement appro- priate lessons in my classes.	61	19	7	10	5
4	I think that younger generation should learn more than 2 languages.	78	15	2	5	0
5	I think that multilingualism will help my students for their future carrier.	60	20	5	7	8
6	I enjoy teaching in a multicultural class- room.	55	20	8	9	9
7	I feel comfortable in raising questions about multilingualism in university set- ting.	39	14	19	17	10
8	I think that my students know what multilingualism is.	29	18	23	12	18
9	I think that teachers should be well trained to teach in a multicultural envi- ronment.	41	30	18	11	0
10	I think that multilingualism promote tolerance among people in my country	44	29	10	11	6
11	I think that my class teacher educa- tion/subject teacher education has pre- pared me to face pupils from different cultures.	21	19	17	23	30
12	I get enough support from my employer in working with pupils from another culture.	53	30	5	7	5
13	I would be ready to work as a teacher abroad.	25	31	14	20	10
14	I am ready to work as a teacher of an immigrant group of pupils from differ- ent cultures.	50	13	7	17	13
15.	I am aware of how my own values can affect the pupils.	29	26	11	14	20



16.	I believe that different cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration when teaching.	70	20	10	0	0
17.	I have a clear understanding how to approach teaching in a multicultural group.	49	21	15	10	5
18.	I am able to understand problems arising from view of pupils' cultural experiences, values and lifestyles.	35	45	15	5	0
19.	I enjoy teaching a multicultural class.	63	25	5	7	
20.	I am able to notice how cultural differences cause limitations between pupils and me.	45	35	10	10	0
21.	I am able to develop strategies for student confidence.	54	31	15	5	5
22.	I have received training on teaching methodologies in a multicultural environment.	40	20	10	15	15
23.	I have participated in projects that included multicultural aspects.	30	/			70
24.	I have examined school curriculum and books for bias.	40	22	13	10	15
25.	I have examined tests for bias.	30	20	15	15	20
26.	I have changed and adapted my teaching to different learning styles.	20	30	20	15	15
27.	I use different materials in my classroom like magazine, video, movies, etc.	65	35	0	0	0
28.	I teach all language skills equally.	70	20	0	10	0
29.	I do classroom debates.	50	/	15	20	15
30.	I promote classroom communication.	85	15	0	0	0



Appendix 2

Classroom Observation Protocol	
Teacher _____	Date _____
Program _____	Class period _____
Number and gender of students _____	
Number of minorities/majority _____	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Description of the classroom:2. Characterize students attitudes toward the subject matter3. Characterize students attitudes toward Teacher4. Materials Used (teacher-made, manufactured, district or department-developed?)5. Classroom activities (Introduction to Lesson, Activity, Tasks and Conclusion)6. Teaching Techniques used	